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# ***Fact Sheet***

## ***Lt. Col. Virgil I. Grissom***

Lt. Col. Virgil Grissom was a native Hoosier and one of America's original seven astronauts. He was born on April 3, 1926, in Mitchel, Indiana. After graduating from high school, he joined the Army Air Corps in 1944.

After completing his initial military service, he enrolled at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. He graduated in 1950 with a degree in mechanical engineering and reenlisted in the Air Force.

He received his commission as a second lieutenant in 1951 and upon completion of pilot training, was sent to Korea where he flew 100 combat missions and won the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal.

Subsequent assignments included duty as an instructor and test pilot at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif. In 1959, Colonel Grissom was chosen for America's space program and became one of the original seven astronauts. The exploits of Colonel Grissom and his fellow astronauts were chronicled in the book and movie, "The Right Stuff."

He flew the second U.S. manned spacecraft, the Liberty Bell, on July 22, 1961. Two years later he teamed with Navy Commander John Young, to fly America's first three orbit missions in the Gemini 3 space capsule. During that flight, he became the first man to maneuver a vehicle in space.

Colonel Grissom was to have the honor of being the first flight commander for the Apollo space program. It was the Apollo program that eventually landed a man on the moon. However, he was killed on January 27, 1967, at Cape Kennedy, Florida, along with two fellow astronauts when they were trapped in their burning Apollo spacecraft. It was engulfed in a flash fire as they were testing the craft on its launching pad.

On May 12, 1968, Bunker Hill AFB was renamed in his honor. When the base became a reserve facility in 1994, the name was changed to Grissom Air Reserve Base. Today, Grissom Air Reserve Base is one of only four Air Force Reserve Command bases in the nation and is home to Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy units.

**Current as of June 2004**